first record of this species in the county since 1980. Although there is no evidence from the same trap of any amount of migrant activity at the time, this specimen was most probably an immigrant.

My thanks to Gerry Haggett for letting me know the unusual nature of this record; and to Christine Marshall of Wells Field Centre for her efficient operation of our light-trap.— PHILIP J. L. GOULD, Rothamsted Insect Survey, Plant & Invertebrate Ecology Division, Rothamsted Research, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 2JQ (E-mail: phil.gould@bbsrc.ac.uk).

EDITORIAL COMMENT:

It may be that the Pale Pinion is on the increase in East Anglia. It has become tolerably frequent in my garden on the east edge of Hertfordshire in the last few years, with both pre- and post-hibernation adults in the trap. For Hertfordshire as a whole, there are 12 records since 1 January 2000, but only four records before that date. For Essex, county recorder Brian Goodey tells me that Dave Perry captured an adult at Great Dunmow in April 2004; the third Essex record, but only the first since publication of a list in the *Victoria County History of Essex* in 1903. Since then, Phil Jenner has taken more examples at light in his garden at Chrishall in north-west Essex.

News on the conservation of some UK Biodiversity Action Plan moths in 2003

Barberry Carpet *Pareulype berberata* (D. & S.)

There was no funding available from English Nature for survey and monitoring of the Barberry Carpet moth *Pareulype berberata* in 2003, for the first time since 1987. The limited funds available were used to maintain the captive stock of the moth and support and encourage propagation and planting of Common Barberry *Berberis vulgaris*, the larval foodplant, to increase the size of some remaining stands. Captive breeding of the moth was very successful, almost certainly due to the prolonged warm dry summer, as in previous years with such weather. Between 3,000 and 4,000 pupae are now (January 2004) hibernating in care of Whipsnade Wild Animal Park and the Zoo Federation. However, no livestock was released into establishment sites during the year, pending the results of a scan for exotic pathogens, expected to take place at London Zoo this winter. Concerns over this issue were raised following the detection of exotic gregorine parasites in the culture of Field Crickets *Gryllus campestris* L. being reared at London Zoo for release in Britain

In order to prevent a complete break in the continuity of the survey and monitoring, I spent 2 September 2003 visiting and assessing the populations and habitat condition of most of the occupied sites in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, and meeting land-owners and other interested parties, supported by Writtle College, University of Essex. Good numbers of Barberry Carpet larvae were seen at most of the nine native sites, but over-zealous, almost brutal, trimming of foodplants while the second generation of larvae was feeding was a problem at two sites. No larvae were seen at one of the native sites, nor nearby where occupied host plants had been translocated in February 2001.

Populations at single establishment sites in Wiltshire and Northamptonshire did well, and a population established in Suffolk, appears to have done likewise, with a dispersing individual light-trapped in the nearby village on 23 July 2003. An establishment site in Lincolnshire was not monitored, for the first time in many years. A growing number of site owners are expressing a desire to plant Common Barberry to benefit the moth, and some have done so during the year, with over 100 plants newly established at one occupied site. Some of the plantings having taken place as part of Countryside Stewardship and forestry grant schemes. Additional nurserymen are being encouraged to propagate new plants to meet the demand, including staff at Writtle College, in some cases using seed or cuttings collected this summer from occupied sites.

Four-spotted Moth *Tyta luctuosa* (D. & S.)

In 2003, the Four-spotted moth *Tyta luctuosa* emerged earlier than ever recorded before, with the first adult seen at its main Northamptonshire colony on 27 April, followed by others on every weekly visit thereafter until mid June. Nearly fully grown larvae were found during nocturnal searches of single sites in Northamptonshire on 25 June (one larva) and Lincolnshire on 26 June (seven larvae). As a consequence of these observations and the continuing hot, dry summer, a more numerous than usual second generation of adults was predicted. However, although slightly larger numbers of second generation adults were seen at the Northamptonshire site, the moth was only noted in ones and twos, while transect counts of 11-21 individuals were recorded during the first generation. Light-trapping by derelict allotments over one kilometre from this breeding site produced two moths on 6 August, but a return visit four days later produced none. It is not yet clear whether this is a discovery of an unknown population or dispersal from the known one, but suitable breeding habitat is present. In contrast, at Portland, Dorset, the moth was not seen in April and did not reach substantial numbers until weeks later, a pattern consistent with previous years at this site. Eventual numbers at the light-trap at Portland Bill Bird Observatory were some of the highest ever.

A number of unsuccessful searches for the moth took place both in Essex and Somerset, where adults are occasionally reported, usually as singletons, and where undiscovered populations are suspected. There are concerns that the moth may now have been lost from the second of its two remaining known sites in Nottinghamshire, where the last confirmed record was of several on 14 July 1997, with a probable sighting on 19 July 1999. Six scrapes, each 25m × 4m, were made on south-facing banks on this site on 8 April, in an effort to greatly increase the extent of prime habitat on site. This has been spectacularly successful, with an abundance of Field Bindweed (the larval foodplant) now growing on the scrapes. Despite this, no Four-spotted were seen anywhere on the site during 2003, although Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* (L.) and Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera* (L.) appear to have benefited from creation of the scrapes. Illustrations of these scrapes will shortly be published *British Journal of Entomology and Natural History* together with an account of the work and of a BENHS field meeting to monitor the

results. Populations on at least two sites in Oxfordshire will be one of the subjects of study in 2004, and a record of a singleton from one of these in 2003 has been received. Records of singletons near Durlston, Dorset, suggest there may be a colony in this area. If readers know of any other sites where the moth can be seen reliably, these can be included in the national survey, which is being conducted by Writtle College, with funding from English Nature and help from Butterfly Conservation, to advance the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

Marsh Moth *Athetis pallustris* (Hb.)

There now appears to be only one known breeding site for the Marsh Moth *Athetis pallustris* in the British Isles. This is on the Lincolnshire coast, where three adult males were seen by the author on 30 May 2003 during a routine light-trapping visit to monitor the population as part of the Butterfly Conservation Action for Threatened Moths Project, part-funded by English Nature. The males ranged from very fresh to rather worn. The following night the author led a BENHS nocturnal field meeting to explore Red Farm Flash, near North Somercotes, further north on the Lincolnshire coast. The habitat is very similar to the occupied site. This was the second time a BENHS meeting has been held on this site in the hope of detecting the Marsh Moth and was a week earlier than in 2002 (see *Ent. Rec.* **115**: 216 and *Br. J. ent. Nat. Hist.* **17**, in press). Despite good weather, again no Marsh Moth were seen. The same night Adrian Russell and friends light-trapped without finding the moth at Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire, a former site from which the Marsh Moth has not been recorded for over 40 years. There was no specific searches or litter-piling at Gibraltar Point, Lincolnshire, in 2003, where both types of search in the last three years have produced negative results (*Ent. Rec.* **115**: 217). If the moth survives here, it is clearly very much rarer than in the past, when it was possible to obtain it from many parts of the reserve using actinic traps left out all night. 24 litter-piles were constructed by English Nature staff on the occupied site and sifted by the author on 10 October. One larva which is very probably of the Marsh Moth was obtained. The identification is subject to confirmation from photographs taken and from rearing the larva. Every year several other species of noctuid larvae are found and some are notoriously difficult to distinguish from the Marsh Moth, hence the need for great care over identification. Issues of site management are being investigated to see if there is anything which can be done to raise the population density of this species on the site to the levels of the late 1980s and early 1990s, when over a hundred larvae were sometimes reported during examination of litter-piles.

White-spotted Pinion *Cosmia diffinis* (L.)

Record numbers of the White-spotted Pinion *Cosmia diffinis* were light-trapped at sites in Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire during 2003, coincident with the hot nights experienced during August when the adults were on the wing. A gravid female was captured at last, after four years of trapping and recording well over 100 males (see *British Wildlife* **15**: 61). The moth was discovered in several more woods near the known ones. However, it was also noted that there is a resurgence of Dutch

Elm Disease at present and a number of elms which looked healthy at the start of the Butterfly Conservation Action for Threatened Moths Project, are now dead or dying. One result of the BC/EN funded surveys of the White-spotted Pinion and follow-up work is that forestry management underway to replace elms with planted Ash in an occupied shelterbelt at Madingley, Cambridgeshire, has been reversed by the University of Cambridge to safeguard the larval foodplant of this rare moth.

Although the moth appears to be quite well distributed in woods with tall elms on and near the Huntingdonshire/Cambridgeshire border, further searches of elm woods nearer to Peterborough failed to find it. Essex and Bedfordshire are the only other counties from which the moth has been recorded since the start of the project, so it is good to be able to report that the moth was seen in both in 2003. In Essex it was seen again at Langenhoe, on 31 July – one was captured in a light-trap there on 18 August 2002 (Hugh Owen). I undertook a search for larvae there with Hugh Owen, Joe Firmin and Phil Smith on 22 May 2003. No larvae were seen, but one empty leaf shelter with all the characteristics for this moth was found. This suggests any resident population is at low density, at least in the parts of the trees within reach from the ground. A second Essex site which produced an adult moth in 2002 was searched for larvae the same day, without success. A singleton was captured in August 2003 in the garden of John Day (the younger of two John Days working for RSPB) at Potton, near Sandy in Bedfordshire. This is the second White-spotted Pinion trapped by John, who had one at the same site on 2 August 2002. There are elms nearby which we hope to investigate for larvae in 2004. Access permission has also been obtained at last for light-trapping in Coppice Wood, which is the site which produced the last previous records from Bedfordshire, in 1985. The site has been visited by day and there is much healthy elm of more than one species and age class.

Some eggs were laid by the gravid female, from which it is hoped to rear some larvae during 2004, to study their feeding behaviour and any preferences, sleeving some outside on growing foodplant.

The Butterfly Conservation project on this moth, co-ordinated by the author, has involved a large number of people, but in addition to the above, we would particularly like to thank Barry Dickerson and John Dawson (County Moth Recorders for Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire respectively), Ruth Edwards (site owner and moth enthusiast), Will Kirby (RSPB), John Comont (Bedfordshire County Ecologist), Charles Baker and everyone else who helped with searches. In addition to all the above-mentioned, the author also thanks Mark Parsons, Head of Moth Conservation at Butterfly Conservation, for his efforts to ensure continuation of funding for the above projects.— PAUL WARING, 1366 Lincoln Road, Werrington, Peterborough PE4 6LS (e-mail: paul_waring@btinternet.com).